

CRIMES AGAINST CREATIVITY

DESPITE, AND PARTLY BECAUSE OF, TODAY'S RECORD-HIGH PRICES FOR THE WORLD'S FINEST WORKS, THE ART WORLD IS BEING RATTLED BY A WAVE OF FAKES AND ROBBERIES. AND AS **CAIN NUNNS** WRITES, THIEVES, FORGERS AND DETECTIVES ALIKE ARE ALL USING SCIENTIFIC TECHNIQUES AS A KEY TOOL IN THEIR ARSENAL, AS THEY BATTLE FOR SUPREMACY IN THIS MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR CRIME MARKET

A VISITOR ADMIRES WORKS BY CATALAN ARTIST JOAN MIRÓ AT CHRISTIE'S AUCTION HOUSE IN LONDON, ENGLAND

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Robert Driessen used to live the high life. In the 1980s, he rented and lived in a decadent 11-room villa in eastern Netherlands, and drove a BMW 7 series car. It was a good life for an artist, and one funded by his decades-long run as one of the world's most successful art forgers, producing paintings and sculptures — particularly of late Swiss heavyweight Alberto Giacometti — that fooled museums, collectors, galleries and every major auction house in the world.

Today, Driessen, aged 58, sits stranded in paradise. His estimated US\$4.12 million share of the US\$10.99 million haul that his gang supposedly raked in for forgeries as the lost work of Pablo Picasso's mate has long since gone. So too has his family. All that is left is a small café on the sun-kissed Thai island of Koh Samui — a palm- and five-star resort-laced playground off the kingdom's east coast that helped The Land of Smiles welcome close to 27

million tourists through the turnstiles last year.

"I received a notice to appear. If I go back to Holland, they might return me to Germany," he tells *Discovery Channel Magazine*. "I like the sun a lot more than the cold though — I know that much." Driessen's former colleagues have already been locked up. "My wife and son left me here, because I couldn't afford to look after them. I've been here by myself."

He has made the island his home for the last eight years, because he had to. German authorities still want to arrest the portly Dutchman with the shock of silver hair. "People paid me not to attend trial," he claims. "They made millions, that's why they didn't want me there. They asked me to make this and that. Then we were supposed to split the money. They sent me to Thailand and paid all of my bills," he notes. "But of course, they ended up getting convicted."

The Germans believe Driessen forged about 1,000 sculptures. The Arnhem native and high school dropout puts that figure at closer to 1,300.

Driessen says that he spent over three decades forging paintings and sculptures. But none were as economically and artistically rewarding as the long, languid figures that posthumously made Giacometti the world's most expensive sculptor. "I loved making Giacomettis," he says.

While Giacometti, whose famous face adorns the Swiss 100-franc banknote, and whose *L'Homme Qui Marche I* sold at Sotheby's in 2011 for US\$104.3 million, was a feverish worker, he was also notorious for not keeping track of how many pieces he had actually created.

It was this opacity that made it easier for Driessen to fool the art world for years, by not just reproducing his work, but creating new pieces in his style and stamping them with the

ALBERTO GIACOMETTI'S *TROIS HOMES QUI MARCHENT I*, WHICH IS ESTIMATED TO BE WORTH £6.2 MILLION TO £8 MILLION (US\$10 MILLION TO US\$13.3 MILLION), WENT ON SALE IN FEBRUARY 2014 AT CHRISTIE'S AUCTION HOUSE

COVER STORY

NAUGHTY PRESIDENT

Amedeo Modigliani is one of the most faked artists around, thanks to the popularity and priciness of his work. So who better to forge his artwork and knowingly verify fake Modigliani pieces, than the president of the Modigliani Institute? In 2013, Christian Parisot was arrested for providing false certificates of authenticity, to the tune of US\$8.6 million worth of counterfeit works. Modiglianis are relatively difficult to authenticate, due to the artist's chaotic life, lack of an organised catalogue and his penchant for paying bills with paintings.

same foundries that the Swiss master had used before his death in 1966.

By his own account, Driessen, whose website (www.driessenart.com) now touts “original art reproductions” signed by himself, started out by mimicking expressionists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Emil Nolde and August Macke. By the late 1980s, he was casting sculptures of the greats. The market for sculptures is murkier than for

“GALLERIES KNOWINGLY SELL FAKES, THAT IS A 100 PERCENT YES. IT’S ALL DRIVEN BY MONEY, AND MONEY ONLY. THE ART WORLD IS ROTTEN AND I WOULD SAY AT LEAST 300 TO 400 FORGERIES OF MINE WERE SOLD TO THEM”

paintings, partially due to the fact that castings often remain after an artist’s death, and given that the foundries charged with handling castings often made copies of their own.

Driessen says the fakery then spreads along the value chain. “Galleries knowingly sell fakes,” he asserts. “That is a 100 percent yes. It’s all driven by money, and money only. The art world is rotten. I would say at least 300 to 400 forgeries of mine were sold to them — and I’m sure there are a few in museums.” In fact, he believes there are still hundreds of his own works in circulation. “I made 1,300 Giacomettis, but only 800 were destroyed,” he

says. “So there are still 500 unaccounted for.”

A BLIND EYE

Claims have surfaced recently alleging that art dealers and auction houses have been overly eager by accepting forgeries as genuine, and in turn selling them quickly to turn a profit.

Reportedly, if a dealer finds that the work is a forgery, he may quietly withdraw the piece and return it to its previous owner — giving the forger an opportunity to sell it elsewhere.

But forgeries are not the only art crimes on the block. Today’s art market is more lucrative than at any

time in history. Forgeries, along with fraud, theft and the looting of archaeological artifacts, keep the cash registers ringing for various organised crime groups.

One investigator tells *DCM* that the value of the illegal art trade has in recent times reached immense proportions. “The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) estimates art crimes run in the region of US\$6 billion per year,” says Robert Wittman, a former FBI agent who was instrumental in the creation of the FBI’s rapid deployment Art Crime Team in 2004. “About 40 percent of the art market now goes through China, another 40 percent through the US. Some estimates

say that up to 70 percent of the Chinese art market is made up of fakes. It’s all hot money, and criminals follow the market.”

As Wittman sees it, the art market often serves as a training ground for other types of illegality. “Art crime is a gateway crime. You shouldn’t look at these as just committing another theft. I guarantee that these guys are doing [crimes involving] drugs, stolen cars and guns.” He says authorities are constantly playing catch up with criminals, due to the low priority that most law enforcement agencies place on art crimes. Even the FBI only established its Art Crime Team, responsible for addressing art and cultural property crime, a decade ago.

According to the FBI website, the Art Crime Team has to date recovered more than 2,650 items, valued at over US\$150 million. The haul has so far included famed works such as Francisco de Goya’s 1778 painting, *Children With a Cart*. “In Chinese villages, they make the same stuff as they did 500 years ago. The only real difference is in the zeros. It’s very difficult to detect,” says Wittman, the author of the book *Priceless: How I Went Undercover to Rescue the World’s Stolen Treasures*.

UNDERCOVER MOBSTER

During his 20-year career, Wittman reportedly helped recover more than US\$300 million worth of stolen art and cultural property — including a stint posing as an art professor working for the Russian mob, in a sting operation in Madrid, Spain to recover Francisco de Goya’s work, *The Swing*.

But with the art market currently in the midst of its



MAIN PHOTO: CORBIS

COVER STORY

CONFISCATED PAINTINGS STORED IN THE BASEMENT OF GERMANY’S FEDERAL CRIMINAL POLICE OFFICE IN WIESBADEN

RECLAIMING PAINTINGS

A few years ago, a collection of over 1,400 Nazi-confiscated artworks was found in Munich, Germany — which is good, right? However, towards the end of last year, there was an outcry over how the case was being handled. First, experts questioned why it took so long for the discovery of the collection to be announced. The paintings were supposedly found early in 2012, but the find only went public in 2013. Second, German prosecutors decided not to publish a full inventory, which one US lawyer said was a “huge disservice” to families seeking to reclaim their paintings.

HOW DO I FAKE THEE? LET ME COUNTERFEIT THE WAYS

It’s hardly just fake art that gets passed off as real. Diaries, money and plays have all fooled many an expert

TUT TUT

WOULD YOU PAY US\$670,000 FOR A STATUE OF A WOMAN THAT DOESN’T EVEN HAVE ARMS OR A HEAD? IN 2003, THE BOLTON MUSEUM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM DID JUST THAT. CHRISTIE’S AUCTION HOUSE VERIFIED IT AS A GENUINE, 3,300-YEAR-OLD PIECE OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ART. THE STATUE, DUBBED THE “AMARNA PRINCESS”, DEPICTED THE GRANDDAUGHTER OF KING TUTANKHAMEN. THE ONLY PROBLEM — YOU CAN SEE WHERE THIS IS GOING — IS THAT IT WAS THE WORK OF A FORGER



ALL THE WORLD’S A FAKE

HAVE YOU HEARD OF *VORTIGERN AND ROWENA*, THE SHAKESPEARE PLAY? IN 1796, A MAN NAMED WILLIAM HENRY IRELAND CLAIMED TO HAVE FOUND THE BARD’S LOST PLAY, WHICH WAS VERIFIED BY COLLEGE OF HERALDS SECRETARY FRANCIS WEBB. HE ALLEGEDLY SAID IT WAS EITHER FROM SHAKESPEARE’S PEN, “OR FROM HEAVEN”. THE PLAY HAD BEEN WRITTEN BY IRELAND HIMSELF



“OW, MY HAND!”

DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, HOW DID THE SOUTHERN CONFEDERATE GOVERNMENT — WHICH HAD SPLIT FROM THE UNION — STOP ITS NEW AND FRAGILE CURRENCY FROM BEING FORGED? GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAND-SIGNED EVERY SINGLE BILL. (NATURALLY, CROOKS QUICKLY LEARNED TO FAKE SIGNATURES, TOO)



biggest financial bubble in history, art insiders say that such triumphs may represent just the tip of a global criminal iceberg. Since World War II, most art thefts and operations around the looting of antiquities have involved organised crime groups, ranging from large international syndicates such as Cosa Nostra and the Unione Corse, to small, local organised gangs.

Michelangelo Merisi o Amerighi da Caravaggio was a Roman baroque master who drank, brawled and later murdered his way into exile in

SINCE WORLD WAR II, MOST ART THEFTS AND OPERATIONS AROUND THE LOOTING OF ANTIQUITIES HAVE INVOLVED ORGANISED CRIME GROUPS

Naples. He also painted *Nativity with St Francis and St Lawrence*, the completion of which was estimated at 1609 and valued at roughly US\$20 million. The painting was stolen from the Oratory of San Lorenzo in Palermo, Sicily in 1969. Still unrecovered, the Mafia has been blamed for its theft, with several former mafiosi-turned-informants testifying at separate times that the mob had stolen and damaged the masterpiece, though the accounts vary.

Lynda Albertson, the chief executive officer of the Association for Research into Crimes against Art (ARCA), says

that the layperson's typical, sometimes even sympathetic, view of fictional art thieves may be well off the mark.

"A network of thieves working for unscrupulous billionaires who are contemplating a made-to-order theft of a Picasso for that pride of place spot above the divan in the library? I would have to say, leave that for the Hollywood movies. Thieves come in all shapes and sizes," she says.

She cites one example of the web of organised crime that art theft can be entangled within.

"In 1990, Gabriel Metsu's *Woman Reading a Letter*, valued at £8 million (over US\$13 million), which had been stolen in Dublin, Ireland, later turned up in Istanbul [in Turkey] as barter for a shipment of heroin," she says. "It was stolen by Martin Cahill, a serious Irish gangster with ties to the IRA (Irish Republican Army),

who was later murdered in a drive-by shooting. In that case you see strong evidence of organised crime elements."

Yet like conventional occupations, these criminals come in all stripes, she stresses. "If you lined most thieves side by side you wouldn't see strong similarities — other than perhaps the dollar-bill signs each of them thought the fenced item would bring."

MURKY WATERS

Some experts say that putting a dollar amount on the value of the forged art market is very

FEMME AU COSTUME TURC DANS UN FANTEUIL, PAINTED BY PABLO PICASSO IN 1955. WHEN IT WENT ON AUCTION AT CHRISTIE'S IN FEBRUARY THIS YEAR, IT WAS THE FIRST TIME IN OVER 50 YEARS THAT IT WAS PUT UP FOR SALE. THE PIECE SOLD FOR £16.9 MILLION, WHICH TRANSLATES TO OVER US\$28 MILLION



What is going on here? Was the artist going through a Batman phase, inspired by the villainous Two-Face? Or did he just get lazy and nod off halfway through? Neither. This was the work of Francisco de Goya, one of Spain's most renowned painters. Or should we say, it was the *purported* work of Goya.

The portrait of Maria Isabella de Bourbon, a daughter of the ruling Spanish monarch, was bequeathed to the Fogg Art Museum in 1943. It looked real enough, with the paint bearing the crackle marks of age, but some experts felt something was off with this 18th-century work.

In 1954, X-ray images were taken of the painting which revealed an earlier portrait of a different woman beneath. Further tests also showed that the surface paint was a modern version that did not exist in Goya's time, and had been applied, so as to not obscure the "craquelure" (fine cracking of paint over time). After rigorous analysis, the conservators left the work in its (literally) two-faced state, as testament to the sophisticated obscurities of forgery.

MAIN PHOTO: CORBIS

HOW DO I FAKE THEE?

ADOLF'S BIG LIE

IN PUBLISHING TERMS, IT WAS A TRUE BOMBSHELL: **ADOLF HITLER'S DIARIES HAD BEEN FOUND.** IT WAS 1983, AND THE DOCUMENTS HAD PURPORTEDLY BEEN HIDDEN FOR YEARS AFTER BEING RECOVERED FROM A PLANE CRASH IN 1945. THE DIARIES PASSED MUSTER EVEN UNDER SCRUTINY FROM THREE HANDWRITING EXPERTS, BUT WERE SOON REVEALED TO BE **FAKES WRITTEN WITH 1980S-ERA INK**



TO BE OR NOT TO BENITO

"THIRTY VOLUMES OF MANUSCRIPTS CANNOT BE THE WORK OF A FORGER. YOU CAN FALSIFY A FEW LINES OR EVEN PAGES, BUT NOT A SERIES OF DIARIES." SO SAID AN EXPERT WHO AUTHENTICATED THE **DIARIES OF BENITO MUSSOLINI** IN 1957. THEY LATER TURNED OUT TO BE FAKE

GOT 998 PROBLEMS...

AND FORGERY IS ONE. LAST YEAR, INDONESIAN POLICE SEIZED A STASH OF FOREIGN CURRENCY VALUED AT NEARLY US\$1 BILLION. THE ONLY PROBLEM? THE FORGERS' STASH CONSISTED PRIMARILY OF **AMERICAN MILLION-DOLLAR BILLS** — 998 OF THEM, TO BE PRECISE



THE \$IMPSONS

PERHAPS THE FORGERS GOT THEIR IDEA FROM THE *SIMPSONS* EPISODE *THE TROUBLE WITH TRILLIONS*, WHEREIN MISTER BURNS STEALS A TRILLION-DOLLAR BILL FROM THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT. BURNS IS EVENTUALLY ARRESTED FOR **"GRAND, GRAND, GRAND, GRAND LARCENY"**



difficult, because in a bullish market in particular, the prices of authentic artworks vary and fluctuate wildly. "Generally, there is little empirical data on this subject, so getting facts and figures are hard," says Toby Bull, a senior inspector in the Hong Kong Police Force and an art crime expert.

"Interpol used to publish a figure, as did a few others," he adds. "But they don't now, as tying in a dollar value to art crime, especially when it crosses over and is interrelated to other crimes, is virtually impossible to calculate."

Even the estimated *number* of forged pieces is in question. According to Bull and Dr Noah Charney, founder of ARCA, one Italian study estimated that 10 percent of the world's museum collections are either forged or misattributed, while media reports often quote Western law enforcement agencies warning that the total amount of forgeries in the marketplace could be as high as 50 percent. Thomas Hoving, who was director of the esteemed Metropolitan Museum of Art in the United States for 10 years, estimated that forged art comprises up to 40 percent of the entire global art market.

"People say US\$6 billion per year, but no one knows," says Charney. "Reliable sources, like the US Department of Justice, have called art crime the third highest-grossing criminal trade worldwide every year, behind only the drug and arms trade," he says. "But we do not know for certain, and any guess is merely a guess, not even an educated one." Some estimate that as little as 1.5 percent of all stolen art is recovered and the thieves successfully prosecuted.

"What is certain is that art crime is very severe, largely because since the 1940s, the majority of art crime involves organised criminal groups — and occasionally terrorist groups, who reap the benefits," says Charney. He points to reports of Taliban looting in Afghanistan as evidence of how high up the chain of criminality in art crimes can go.

DETECTION SCIENCE

Combating an increasingly sophisticated group of forgers means the science for detecting fakes and forgeries has greatly improved over the years — with modern dating and analysis making the identification of forged pieces easier.

Morellian techniques, developed in the late 19th century by physician and art collector Giovanni Morelli, are used to help sort the work of artists by their unique idiosyncrasies and stylistic details, which tend to remain consistent throughout the artists' careers. By picking out recurring details in an artist's work, analysts can identify and map out a formula, which can then be used to identify or "track" the artist, similar to the way a detective might match fingerprints, or a graphologist might analyse handwriting samples. The same process can be applied to sculptures too, and might include checking for the use of tools or techniques not available when the artist was alive.

At times, forgers have utilised methods that differed from the original artist's, such as uncharacteristic brushwork, perspective, or the use of colours or pigments that didn't exist during the painter's



PAINTING IN PRISON

Geert Jan Jansen (*pictured*) is what you might call a master of forgery. His ability to fake the brushstrokes of famous artists started innocently enough: he was trying to emulate their techniques to better his own.

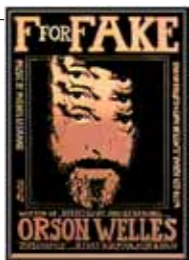
But when a career as an art dealer failed to blossom into success, he went back to his skill, borrowing the style and name of famous painters. Until his arrest in 1994, he spent decades producing around 40 paintings a year. Speaking to author Frank Wynne, Jansen said, "As soon as I got [to prison], the board of governors asked me to dash off a couple of Picassos."

PHOTO: AFP

HOW DO I FAKE THEE?

HOUSE OF CARDS

ORSON WELLES' LAST MAJOR FILM, *F FOR FAKE*, REVOLVED AROUND THE WORLD OF ART FORGER ELMYR DE HORY AND HIS BIOGRAPHER CLIFFORD IRVING. IRONICALLY, IT WAS LATER FOUND THAT IRVING HAD CREATED HIS OWN FORGERY — FAKING THE DIARIES OF ECCENTRIC BUSINESS MAGNATE HOWARD HUGHES



MEANINGFUL WORDS

ORSON WELLES (PLAYING HIMSELF): "IT'S PRETTY BUT IS IT ART? HOW IS IT VALUED? THE VALUE DEPENDS ON OPINION, OPINION DEPENDS ON THE EXPERT, A FAKER LIKE ELMYR MAKES FOOL OF THE EXPERTS — SO WHO'S THE EXPERT? WHO'S THE FAKER?"

DE HORY: "IF THEY ARE HANGED LONG ENOUGH IN THE MUSEUM THEY BECOME REAL"

LIKE CLOCKWORK

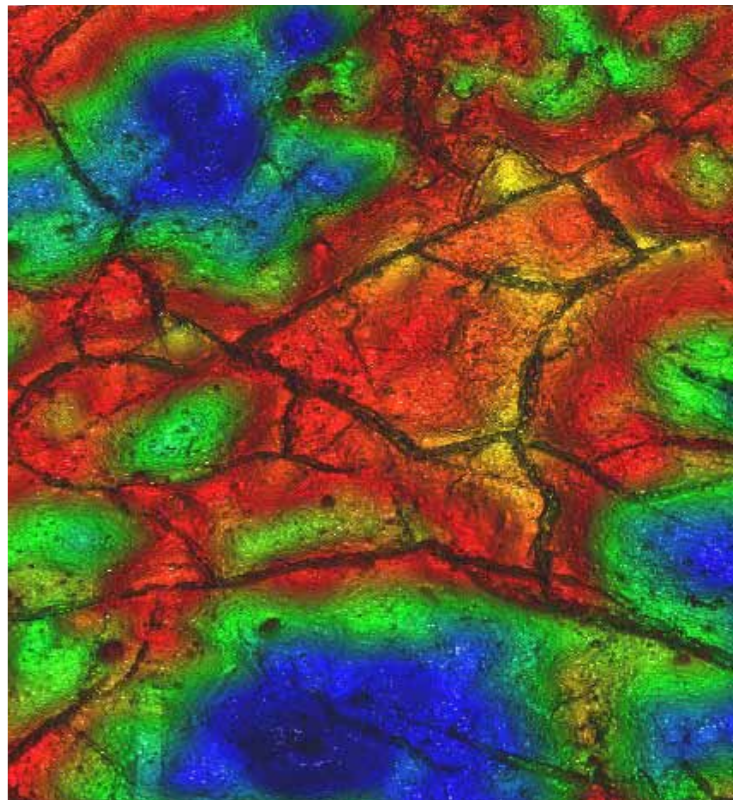
RENOWNED WATCH BRAND ROLEX PUMPS OUT OVER 700,000 TIMEPIECES A YEAR. SUCH POPULARITY HAS MADE IT A PRIME TARGET FOR FORGERS. ACCORDING TO ONE HOROLOGIST, THERE ARE **THREE EASY WAYS TO SPOT A FAKE ROLEX**. FIRSTLY, THEIR SECOND HAND MOVEMENT OFTEN STUTTERS. SECONDLY, THEIR WEIGHT IS NOT AS HEFTY, AS FAKES TEND TO BE MADE WITH CHEAPER MATERIALS. THIRDLY, A TRUE ROLEX WILL COME WITH A "CYCLOPS" LENS THAT MAGNIFIES THE DATE — FAKES OFTEN SKIP THIS STEP. AND IF YOU'RE LUCKY, A FORGERY WILL SLIP UP AND BRAND ITSELF A RULEX



FAKE MUSEUM

A MUSEUM DEDICATED TO FAKERY IN BANGKOK, THAILAND UNDERScores THE HUGE MARKET FOR FAKES. **THE MUSEUM OF COUNTERFEIT GOODS** DISPLAYS, AMONGST OTHER THINGS, FAKE MOBILE PHONE COVERS, VIAGRA, CIGARETTES, PERFUMES, WATCHES AND, WORRIINGLY, EVEN BRAKE PADS

FINGERPRINT FOR ART



With just a snapshot, a square centimetre in size, a snazzy camera-like object called FING-ART-PRINT could spell doom for art thieves, smugglers and forgers. The “fingerprint” in question is captured by recording the artwork’s roughness or topography (in the case of paintings, the unique 3D effect of paint on canvas) and a colour sample.

In a paper presented at the International Conference on Strategies for Saving Indoor Metallic Collections in 2007, the authors, led by conservation scientist Dr Bill Wei, co-inventor of the technology, detailed the advantages of their system. Museum objects, they noted, are typically identified with a cataloguing system. Objects are photographed and tagged with a sticker, barcode or marker. But, they say, “besides the fact that stickers and

markers have the disadvantage of reacting with objects, they have the additional disadvantage that they can be removed and/or forged.”

While the technology to measure an artwork’s topography or “roughness” is not new, it is the application in the new device that is exciting. Due to the system’s compactness, its user-friendly nature, and how speedily it works, the authors note, “FING-ART-PRINT is thus expected to have an enormous impact on the identification and protection of moveable cultural heritage.”

And what about forging the fingerprint of FING-ART-PRINT itself? They’re way ahead of you. “It would be virtually impossible to forge the fingerprint on a micrometre scale (the size of a pigment particle), assuming that a forger even knew where the fingerprint was taken.”

complicate matters, some artists have knowingly accepted copies as their own work or signed off on them — flattered by the attention or admiring of the copy.

ROGUES GALLERY

Forgery has had a long history. Over 2,000 years ago, Roman artisans made copies of Greek sculptures. However, it’s thought that back then, individual artists were barely known, let alone lionised, and art was created to serve as a historical timepiece, a religious icon, or purely for its aesthetic value.

It wasn’t until the Renaissance period, which ushered in waves of wealth across Europe and drove an insatiable demand for fine art, that these works became a

HE WAS SO SUCCESSFUL IN REPLICATING THE STYLES AND COLOURS OF THE GREATS, THAT EVEN THE WORLD’S FOREMOST CRITICS NOT ONLY REGARDED THE WORKS AS GENUINE — BUT AS SOME OF THE FINEST EXAMPLES THEY HAD EVER SEEN

commercial commodity. As a result, the identity of the artist in turn gained a benchmark value in art transactions.

Dr Alexander Nagel, a professor of Renaissance art at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York, in the United States, has argued that the notion of forgery as we understand it never really existed before a Western art market was established around 1,500 BC. He noted that before that time, a facsimile could usually fill in for an original work, if it transmitted the same content and tone.

While most forgers are considered lesser artists

standing on the shoulders of the greats, sometimes even the greats themselves were found with their hands in the cookie jar. For instance, an often-repeated anecdote states that at the end of the 15th century, Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni (you will know him as Michelangelo) made a sleeping Cupid figure, treated it with acidic earth to age it, then sold it to an art dealer.

Thierry Lenain, art historian at the Institut Français in London, England, and author of the 2011 book *Art Forgery: The History of the Modern Obsession*, says that the Italian master frequently forged artworks, replacing the pieces with the originals that he was charged with restoring.

Fast-forwarding to contemporary forgers, Han van

Meegeren is widely considered to be the greatest of all time. It is popularly held that from the 1920s onwards, after his own work was rebuffed by critics and buyers, an embittered Van Meegeren decided to set out to prove his critics wrong, by creating credible forgeries of leading fine artists, including Frans Hals, Gerard ter Borch and Johannes Vermeer.

To say that Van Meegeren fooled his critics would be a bludgeoning understatement. He was so successful in replicating the styles

and colours of the greats, that several of the world’s foremost critics not only regarded the works as genuine — but as some of the finest examples they had ever seen. Experts say that he used historical canvasses and ingeniously formulated his own pigments, eventually fooling collectors into purchasing up to US\$30 million worth of fake Vermeers — which were sold to everyone from Nazi leader Hermann Göring, to the Dutch government, which during World War II was keen on stopping artworks by the country’s masters falling into the hands of the Nazis.

THE FING-ART-PRINT PROJECT (SEE SIDEBAR RIGHT) HAS PRODUCED A TECHNOLOGY THAT IS QUICK AND EASY TO USE. THE BOXY-LOOKING APPARATUS SHOWN ABOVE TAKES AN EXTREMELY HIGH-RESOLUTION IMAGE OF A SMALL SEGMENT OF THE ARTWORK AND PRODUCES A “FINGERPRINT” (SHOWN OPPOSITE) OF THE PIECE THAT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO COPY

time. Some forgers will use chemicals to “age” pieces, or even employ materials that date back to when the work was created — while others resort to drilling holes to mimic worm marks. While attempting to authenticate artwork, experts also try to determine the piece’s provenance — if the item has not left a paper trail, it is more likely to be a forgery. Of course, paperwork too can be forged.

X-ray technology can now help sleuths reveal earlier work hidden beneath forgeries, a clear signal that the forger used old canvasses in order to try and mimic the desired time period. In other cases, X-rays can also be used to look inside an object to determine if it has been altered or repaired.

At the laboratories of the Los Angeles-based Getty Conservation Institute, in the United States, which works to preserve global cultural heritage, examiners use handheld X-ray fluorescence devices to identify pigments and other materials by revealing their elemental composition. However, the institute notes in a report that there are limitations to X-ray fluorescence: only elements heavier than potassium can be identified by this method. As it states, the device was designed to be able to carry out X-ray diffraction as well, to detect the molecular or mineralogical composition of pigments. These technologies are then used together, to help uncover forgeries.

There are other methods that allow researchers to weed out the good, the bad, and the well-forged. For example, ultraviolet fluorescence and infrared analysis can spotlight repairs or old paint on canvasses, while carbon dating can date an object that is up to 10,000 years old.

Other innovations have proven invaluable in establishing the authenticity of sculptures. One technique, called stable isotope analysis, determines where marble used in a sculpture was quarried; while another, thermoluminescence, helps to date pottery artefacts.

Wavelet decomposition, or the analysis of digital images of paintings, is a technique described in a 2004 paper, which breaks pictures down

into a collection of basic images called “subbands”. The *Science News* article reporting the research explained, “Just as a musical tone consists of a low fundamental frequency with higher-frequency overtones, an image’s low-frequency subbands show the broad strokes, while higher-frequency subbands depict details.” As one of the study authors said at the time, “A master might have smooth, consistent strokes, say, while an imitator is jerky.” And since an artist tends to have a unique style throughout his or her career, the subband analysis would set the forged work apart.

Unfortunately, even with such investigative tools at hand, experts do not always agree on the authenticity of an item. To

MAIN PHOTO: “MANSPORET” BY DAVID VAN DER PLAES. COURTESY OF MUSEUM BOIJMANS VAN BEUNINGEN, ROTTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS

In a bizarre twist, Van Meegeren pieces eventually found a lucrative market of their own, which also attracted forgers. One of these was his son, Jacques van Meegeren, who wrote fraudulent



certificates verifying the authenticity of his father's work.

In 2012, Ken Perenyi — the self-described “best American art forger” — published his memoir, *Caveat Emptor: The Secret Life of an American Art Forger*, chronicling the creation and sale of thousands of knock-offs of masters such as James Buttersworth, Martin Johnson Heade and Charles Bird King to famous auction houses. In his book, Perenyi estimated that hundreds of his fakes remain in circulation, saying that spotting one in a catalogue is “like bumping into an old friend”. He admitted to enjoying the cloak-and-dagger aspect of art forgery. “I miss the addictive thrill of fooling the experts,” he wrote. “It was great sport for me.”

More recently in the US state of New York, Chinese immigrant Pei-Shen Qian found himself at the centre of an US\$80 million art forgery scandal involving dealer Glafira Rosales, who pleaded guilty to selling more than 60 fake paintings made by Qian, most of them through the prestigious Knoedler & Company gallery. Qian's imitations of paintings by Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and other abstract expressionists helped bring about the collapse of the once-trusted gallery.

While artists have long fallen prey to forgers, criminals have also set their sights on more contemporary targets. In January this year, a Paris high court opened a case brought by graffiti artist John Perello, known as JonOne, in which a

little-known dealer had sold about two dozen paintings that have been falsely attributed to the 50-year-old artist.

Charney, who also teaches the history of art crime in the ARCA's Postgraduate Certificate Programme in Art Crime and Cultural Heritage Protection, says forgeries today are very much “on-trend” with public demand. “Forgeries of graffiti art, like Banksy spray paintings, are fairly new,” he notes. “A Banksy can sell for US\$100,000 but it can be made, identically and with the same materials, for about US\$10. My colleague at Scotland Yard did an experiment to this end and found it to be true,” he says.

Another trend, in Asia this time, is “elegant bribery” (or *yahui*), which in China describes the buying of favours from officials through gifts of art, and is often used there as a way to launder money. ARCA believes that, along with fake art, the use of art for collateral to secure

PERENYI ALSO ADMITS TO ENJOYING THE CLOAK-AND-DAGGER ASPECT OF ART FORGERY. “I MISS THE ADDICTIVE THRILL OF FOOLING THE EXPERTS. IT WAS GREAT SPORT FOR ME”

loans and investments is also likely to rise dramatically.

Meanwhile, back in Driessen's small café in Thailand, the former forger contemplates his new life. “I've started my website selling my own copies. It's not going terribly well at the moment,” he says, admitting that running on his own reputation is proving more challenging than riding on the back of someone else's. “There has been some reaction from people,” he says. “But still, it's nowhere near as easy as signing Giacometti's name.” ●

A PAINTER WORKS ON A COPY OF A PAINTING BY MODERN CHINESE PAINTER YUE MINJUN AT DAFEN VILLAGE, CHINA
LEFT: DUTCHMAN HANS VAN MEEGEREN AT HIS TRIAL FOR FORGING PAINTINGS. HE IS BELIEVED TO BE THE BEST FORGER OF ALL TIME



STREETS LINED WITH MONET

Just north of Hong Kong lies Dafen Village. You may not have heard of it, but there's a good chance its work is on your wall, or the wall of someone you know. Up until a few years ago, some 5,000 to 8,000 Chinese artists churned out reproductions of artistic masterpieces at a blistering rate — accounting for 60 percent of the world's oil paintings.

Rembrandts, Warhols, Monets: you name it, you can get a famed work reproduced for about US\$40. Many painters churn out small canvasses at a rate of 10 per day. The economic downturn has hit Dafen, however. At the same time, China's booming middle class is now better able to afford “real” artwork and doesn't frequent Dafen as much. As such, many workshops have slashed the numbers of their workhorse painters.

But last year, self-proclaimed “anti-designer” Zhenhan Hao forged something real from the artists who churn out fakes. Working with about 40 of the artisans, he commissioned new works of art in the style of a renowned artist — from the artisan themselves. One expert Van Gogh imitator, Mister Zhao, rendered a representation of his bedroom with all the vim and colour of the Dutch legend.